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AUTHOR Maidment, Robert
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ABSTRACT

This paper offers principals a practical, six-hour plan for facilitating faculty development. Each phase, along with a suggested time limit, is described as follows: (1) 15 minutes--participants (faculty, support personnel, and citizen representatives) divide into groups of seven; (2) 75 minutes--group compiles a list of "this we believe" statements concerning instruction of the young; (3) 15 minutes--break; (4) 75 minutes--group prioritizes all statements; (5) 60 minutes--group specifies forces that are helping or hindering them in their quest for improvement; (6) 60 minutes--group proposes 2-3 items that would bring about the desired condition; (7) 40 minutes--group suggests specific staff action; and (8) 20 minutes--critique. During the final phase, lasting about two weeks, departments, grade-level groups, or teaching teams are asked to rank order the items in terms of priority and commitment. The principal then prepares an implementation plan based on the collected data.(Author/LD)

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A FACULTY-INITIATED PLAN FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT--
PUTTING ALL BEGS IN ONE ASK-IT

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A FACULTY-INITIATED PLAN FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT--PUTTING ALL BEGS IN ONE ASK-IT

Robert Maidment

The chronic sameness of most in-service efforts is predictable. The recurrent theme of external consultants verbally dumping on gatherings of fantasizing (or knitting, or yawning) teachers is all too familiar. Starting with only one given--an unencumbered day--the building principal, or a negotiated facilitator, can exercise one option to the nonparticipatory, irrelevant, compulsive, and preemptory type of in-service activity. The six-hour plan is based upon a simple premise: trust a faculty to invent its own future.

In this effort the building principal becomes a consultant to his staff. The school itself may be rural regional or metropolitan magnet. It really doesn't matter, since, as the venerable saw insists, "it's not the school, it's the principal of the thing." What follows is a strategy for re-plotting urges. Caution: it usually works. A staff may never again be quite the same.

Phase One -- The Mix (15 minutes)

List the staff interfaces: Veterans and neophytes; men and women; so-called academics and so-called non-academics; blacks and whites; upper grade and lower grade; certificated and non-certificated; insiders and outsiders; teachers and administrators; cousins and strangers. Arbitrarily pre-mix in groups of seven--not for luck, but for interaction. The physical setting would, of course, be determined by the number of participants. A school cafeteria with tables and chairs (not attached benches) and with extensive wall space is appropriate. Allow time for learning first names. Perhaps, at least for a single day, all titles and ranks can be abandoned. Within large faculties the odds favor individuals meeting colleagues, support personnel, and citizen representatives for the first time in this game-of-the name activity.

Phase Two -- The Task (75 minutes)

Charge each group with compiling a list of "this we believe" statements concerning the instruction of the young. Ten minutes of brainstorming will get conversation going (Suggestions: record all responses, avoid value judgments, eliminate discussion, encourage idea piggy-backing). Select out key ideas or phrases. Refine these statements and record them on 5 x 8" index cards. Work toward consensus, if possible, but permit the inclusion of "different" ideas. Two examples of "We believe _____" statements: 1) "We believe that all teaching assignments should reflect both the teacher's unique academic interest and inter-personal skills." or 2) "We believe that teachers are capable of monitoring their own performance."

Mr. Maidment is a professor of Educational Administration, The College of William and Mary.

(Note: As a substitute activity, the staff could respond to a "Pre-packaged" set of statements regarding desirable school characteristics. [1])

Allow ample time for discussion and re-phrasing. As the statements are processed, the cards are forwarded to the principal, or to whomever is coordinating the program. Then, an unedited, easily read, summary is made on chart paper and attached to the unencumbered wall.

Phase Three -- The Break (15 minutes)

As the small groups move from table clusters to independent seating near "the wall," provide time for a break and for the recording of all statements. The total group will now have tangible evidence of its effort to date. Curious wall watchers will begin to note similarities and disparities between and among the statements generated by the independent groups.

Phase Four -- The Prioritizing (75 minutes)

Once all of the "we believe" statements are reviewed by the total group the principal or cooridinator elicits questions, calls for clarifications, and accepts group initiated editing suggestions. A contrasting color marker may be used in exorcising overlaps, re-phrasing ambiguous statements, and underscoring others for emphasis. If certain persons hold tenaciously to one or more statements as originally phrased within the smaller task group, leave them as presented and trust the total group to modify the statements later, if appropriate. Once discussion of the items diminishes in intensity, the coordinator will work toward a "general" acceptance of each statement. That is, the staff generally "buys" the ideas or concepts as professionally and personally acceptable. The next step is particularly critical. The principal asks the total group to prioritize all statements initially into broad high, middle, and low categories and eventually, time permitting, a further ordering within each category.

Thus, the staff has, in a single work session, produced a prioritized listing of "we believe" statements. The work may be described as an ordered set of idealized statements of "how things might be" in one particular school The staff has, in essence, described its "desired condition."

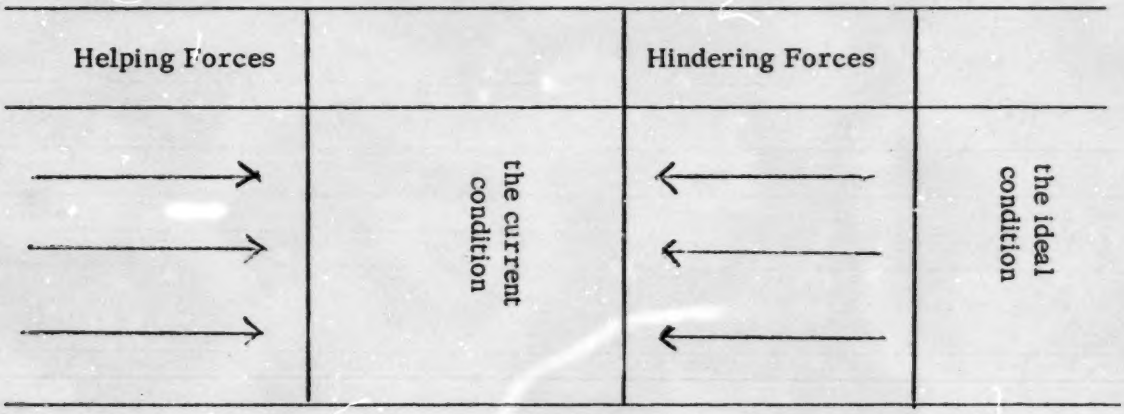
Provide the total group with a key question to ponder during the midday break: "what is the difference, if any, between what we say we'd like to be (or believe) and what we presently are (or believe)?"

(1) Postman, Neil & Weingartner, Charles. The School Book, Delacorte Press, New York, 1973, pp. 30-43.

Phase Five -- The Analysis (60 minutes)

By adapting Kurt Lewin's Force-Field Analysis to our one-day staff development effort we can focus upon those factors or forces which currently prevent the school staff from inventing its future consistent with the desired condition. During the lunch break "the wall" is re-papered. As noted, the prior effort has provided a description of the desired condition. The school staff will perceive its present condition as being somewhere short of its idealized state.

We may assume that the sum of forces driving this school staff toward its ideal condition is precisely equal to a corresponding sum of forces restraining the staff in the quest for educational change. The next task is clear: specify those forces which are either helping or hindering the staff in its quest for improvement.



For example, a perceived "need for a planned, systematic staff development effort: is a helping force. A corresponding hindering force might be, "Insufficient professional planning time." Most of the helping and hindering items will not match-up in like manner. Nor will the forces be equal in either intensity or in duration. (Factors of intensity and duration are often visually depicted by shaping the arrows--a long, thin arrow indicates "long duration, low intensity;" a short thick arrow indicated "short duration, high intensity," and so forth.) It is the sum total of the helping forces which is neutralized by the sum total of the hindering forces. It must be so else "the current condition" would be located closer to or further from "the ideal condition." Invite the staff to cluster into triads of co-workers with whom each has never or only occasionally worked. Ask each triad to identify and clarify at least two specific helping and two specific hindering forces on this faculty/staff group.

Following 15 minutes of triad interaction reconvene the total group and process the data by recording it on the wall chart as suggested. Tie together those suggestions having a natural linkage. Solicit additional helping or hindering forces which are generated by those already processed. Once the wall is well covered with supporting and restricting phrases, begin to highlight those factors which are particularly intense. Suggestions: Use (+) and (-) signs. A very strong helping force might rate a (+++) while a low-intensity hindering force may rate a single (-) sign. The staff has now provided its own response to "why-it-is-where-it-is." The sum of the helping forces is offset by the sum of the hindering forces. Can existing helping forces be strengthened to move the "current condition" toward the "ideal condition"? Can new helping forces be added? Is it possible to remove or reduce any hindering forces? Save the wall data for later editing, review, and planning.

Phase Six -- The Action Agenda (60 minutes)

Return to the original seven-member task groups. Provide each group with the composite "we believe" list and an action agenda form:

Item	Who	Does What	With Whom	When	To Achieve What Ends	How We Know We Did What We Planned

Ask each group to propose 2-3 items which, if implemented, would bring the staff closer to its "desired" condition. A restraint might be that the recommended actions reflect available resources, e.g., "do-able" items. A principal may wish, however, to elicit all positive suggestions, whether or not they may be currently realistic.

Phase 7 -- The Plan (40 minutes)

Reconvene the total group and hear a read-out of the action agenda items. Since additional time is needed for refinement, priority, and staff agreement on the specific items to be implemented, it should be sufficient at this point for the staff to feel a sense of motion toward having a specific plan of action. The three "products" of the

one-day investment of staff time and talent are: (1) statements describing the desired condition, (2) statements delineating the helping and hindering forces and (3) statements suggesting specific staff action.

Phase Eight -- The Critique (20 minutes)

During a brief summary exercise the leader solicits reactions from all partipants through a key question oral format or by written responses to an open-ended instrument. Either method should elicit responses regarding: (1) the current level of satisfaction on both feeling and thinking levels, (2) the involvement level in each of the planning events, and (3) the anticipated level of interest in sustaining the present effort.

Phase Nine -- Next Steps (two weeks)

Following the one-day planning activity the principal codifies the action agenda items and distributes them through established internal channels. Departments, grade-level groups, or teaching teams would be asked to rank order the items both in terms of priority and commitment. Within two weeks the principal would prepare, with the assistance of a small task force, an implementation plan based upon the collected data. Appropriate personnel can be designated responsible agents for individual items. Also, periodic progress reporting sessions would be scheduled at this time. The staff should now be on its way toward meaningful, participative self-imposed renewal efforts.

This is one approach to internal staff development. It is likely that the school, its staff and clients, won't ever be quite the same. Only better.